



East Gippsland soils under the microscope

TopSoils events kick off in November across East Gippsland.

The TopSoils project is a multi-partner regional project that has gathered soil and plant data across over 100,000 hectares in East Gippsland to benchmark current soil condition, soil fertility and farming practices.

Results are being used to develop several demonstrations sites and guide the actions of four TopSoils producer groups. In November the project gears up for a series of events across the region.

The four farmer driven groups have identified a training program to be run over the next two years. To kick this off, senior soil scientist with SESL Australia, Declan McDonald, will return to the area to run a series of four workshops.

These workshops will focus on visual soil assessment (VSA), which provides a quick and simple method to assess soil condition and plant performance, and how they are affected and modified by farm management practices. In addition soil pits will be examined to demonstrate what is happening below the depth of 10cm.

These events will be held at Calulu on November 7, Orbost November 8, Bengworden November 9 and Ensay November 10.

Participants are asked to bring along a square soil sample that is one shovel width wide by one shovel



Wayne Burton, from the Agriculture Department, examining plant response to nutrients at the Southern Farming Systems TopSoils trial site on the Red Gum Plains. (PS)

width deep by one shovel width high and it is important to try to keep the sample as an intact cube of soil.

There is also a lot to look forward to as the three TopSoils demonstration sites get underway and open up to the community. The first open day is to be held by Agriculture Victoria on Tuesday 15th November at Norwood Farms Swan Reach. This demonstration site is investigating the effects of nutrients and rotational graz-

ing on weed loads in improved pasture systems. The field day will explain the demonstration and provide participants with training on the identification of improved pasture species.

The Tambo Valley demonstration sites (Connors Hill and Reedy Flat) are investigating the effects of nutrients and strategic grazing on weed loads in native pasture systems. A field day will be held there on November 21 and will

provide training on native pasture identification.

In late November the Southern Farming Systems supported site will be opened to the public to look at the effects of a wide number of treatments on improved pastures of the Red Gum Plains.

All field days and workshops are free and open to the public. Participants must bring their own lunch and a chair.

This project is funded

through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. TopSoils is an initiative of the East Gippsland CMA and is a collaboration between delivery partners, Agriculture Victoria, East Gippsland Landcare Network, Far East Victoria Landcare, Snowy River Interstate Landcare, Southern Farming Systems and Greening Australia.

For more information on TopSoils groups and their events contact Natalie Jenkins at the

East Gippsland Landcare Network in Bairnsdale or Penny Gray at the Far East Victoria Landcare office in Orbost.

For information on Swan Reach and Tambo Valley Demonstration Sites contact Wayne Burton, Agriculture Department, Bairnsdale. For information on the Red Gum Plains demonstration site contact Janice Dowe, Southern Farming Systems or go to their Facebook page 'Topsoils/SFS Nutrient Demo Site'.